

# Local government in South Africa: twinning election campaigns and service delivery

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## Abstract

Since the promulgation of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996), the local government landscape has been transformed indefinitely. Whether this transformation has been for the better or the worse depends on the approach of a particular frame of reference, school of thought or even expectations. A legislative framework in the form of both the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 117 of 1998 and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000 provides binding guidelines on how municipalities are to administer and manage their affairs effectively and efficiently. This article questions whether election campaigns in the 2011 local government elections concentrated on service delivery in line with the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS). In addressing this, an analysis of the 2011 election manifestos of the three most popular political parties in South Africa is undertaken. It concludes that political parties did not consider the LGTAS during their election campaigns in 2011. One of its implications is that political parties do not always agree with the diagnosis of local government challenges.

**Keywords:** African National Congress, Democratic Alliance, election campaign, election manifesto, Local Government Turnaround Strategy, public service delivery

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The local government sphere emphasises the need to address basic service delivery. In terms of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000, municipal councils are required to appoint section 57 managers, especially municipal managers. The main functions of these managers include the organisation of municipal administration as well as the performance appraisal systems to ensure the

realisation of service delivery. Since municipal councils include both the legislative and executive authorities within municipalities, it is imperative to bear in mind that the political environment (especially elected councillors) influences municipal activities directly. Therefore, electioneering is a necessary tool that determines which political party receives a mandate for five years to deliver on the promises made to the electorate. This electioneering is a tool to convince the society about the suitability of a political party to deliver services (COGTA 2009: 3).

This article seeks to understand whether the election manifestos of political parties which participated in the 2011 local government elections (hereafter the 2011 elections) considered the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) (COGTA 2009) in their campaigning for power. In order to successfully address this question, a discussion detailing the discourse of Public Administration as a discipline is advanced to describe the centrality of service delivery in government activities.

## **2 AN OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S PREMISE ON PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY**

In Public Administration studies, one of the fundamental questions is how the community will satisfy its needs. This question assumes that societies have needs amongst themselves, both at individual as well as societal levels (collective needs). In this regard, societal understanding centres on two issues: firstly, who should be tasked to meet the individual needs (promoting welfare state principles)? Such a type of dependency is evident in developing countries such as South Africa where some members of society are dependent on social grants. Secondly, in a case of societal needs (collective needs), who is responsible for meeting the needs that affect the entire society? These are perennial questions relevant for Public Administration scholarship (Nyagah 1975: 63–65).

The establishment of public institutions, such as government departments, is a necessary platform to address these needs at both levels (individual and societal). This is usually a result of the institutions created through democratic set-ups in constitutional democracies such as South Africa. The notion of the separation of powers, which regards the legislative authority as the law making body, the executive as the law implementing body, and the courts as the law enforcing bodies, plays a convincing role in understanding and addressing the questions raised above.

With the model of the separation of powers in mind, parliamentarians, members of the provincial legislatures and municipal councillors (legislative authority) are elected to represent the electorate in making laws for the country. Usually in the South African context, these legislators are members of political parties which are

required to receive a minimum number of votes from society to be eligible for a seat in the legislature. South African electoral law allows independent candidates to stand only for local government elections. The question that arises is whether political parties (and independent candidates) enter into election campaigns by proposing and marketing possible solutions to local government service delivery challenges.

Steyn-Kotze (2006: 216) writes about service delivery and voting behaviour and argues that the consolidation of South Africa's democracy should centre on meeting society's service expectations. Further, Netswera and Phago (2009: 143) undertook an empirical study on the causal relationship between people's ability to pay and satisfaction with municipal services in Soweto. The main findings were that the better people are able to pay for their municipal services, the less likely they are to be satisfied with the quality of municipal services. Several other authors, such as Tshitsonga and Mafema (2010: 562), Binza and Asmah-Andoh (2009: 270–271), Mubangisi (2009: 437–438), Phago and Netswera (2009: 703) and Toulou and Tuluva (2008: 136–137), share similar views regarding service delivery, democracy, public participation and election as essential elements of social justice in society. By implication, there is an agreement among scholars in identifying government responsibility for improving the livelihoods of its societies. However, the scholarly disagreement is on the manner in which interventions (policies) are to be employed to address specific problems. It should therefore be understood that the challenges of service delivery are necessary for parties' election campaigns as a means to convince the electorate about their programmes of action to remedy existing service delivery shortfalls. It is thus necessary to discuss the linkage between society – political parties – government institutions – service delivery.

### **3 SERVICE DELIVERY PROGRESSION: FROM SOCIETAL NEEDS TO SERVICE REALISATION**

Since governments are in existence to address society's need for services, political parties are elected to office during elections in order to address such societal needs. In order to understand the interrelationships between local government election campaigns, a link between society and service delivery is discussed below in an attempt to argue that all political activities, including electioneering, should highlight a linkage between societal needs and services. The following aspects receive attention:

### **3.1 Society**

The point of departure is a basic assumption about how a society organises itself to realise its service delivery goals. As explained above, every society has needs which must be satisfied. The establishment of political structures in the form of political parties or community based organisations, are examples of how societies can be organised to address their needs and challenges. Usually, the purpose of the popular formations within communities is not mainly to pressure government to render services, but also to understand from the societal point of view their respective challenges. In this regard, popular participation in influencing decisions and choices of government is an essential part of societal formations (such as CBOs and NGOs). The symbolic ‘social contract’ serves in this instance as a facilitator of the community’s need for satisfaction by government. In democratic countries such as South Africa, a constitution serves to represent the social contract between the government and its people (refer to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa), Act 108 of 1996 (the Constitution)). In many circumstances, popular formations tend to keep the government of the day in check on the basis of whether the social contract is realised or not (Matebesi and Botes 2011: 6–7). For example, in 2002, the then Minister of Health Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, lost a court case against the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) when she refused to roll out treatment for HIV positive/Aids individuals. Obviously, one of the major sticking points in this case was whether the Minister had violated the social contract (the Constitution) by denying treatment and health care to those in need (Constitutional Court of South Africa 2002, CCT 8/02).

### **3.2 Political parties**

Some of the major role players that have been accepted as representatives of the communities in democratic societies are elected political representatives. While local government electoral legislation allows individuals to be elected to political offices of municipalities without being a member of a political party, it is clear in South African local government elections that politicians in this sphere of government are largely affiliated with political parties and often utilise political party tickets to get into office. This system is also assisted by the proportional representation (PR) system, which expects the electorate to vote for political parties which submit their internal lists of candidates to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). From this point of view, it is clear that political parties have established themselves as formations within societies and are expected to facilitate those societies’ needs, especially once elected to government. This situation highlights the role of political

parties in societies and questions whether their actions serve either to advance the welfare of the society by attending to the societal service delivery challenges or to benefit only the political parties and their elected representatives. Management of public resources is essential to ensure the acceleration of service delivery in developing countries such as South Africa where poverty is visible both in rural and urban areas (Steyn-Kotze 2006).

### **3.3 Government institutions**

Traditionally in South Africa, the majority political parties form a government through legislative processes of ensuring that Parliament elects the President who is tasked to establish his/her cabinet or government (Constitution 1996: chap. 4 and 5).

The establishment of a cabinet (government) with its own portfolios is a precursor to the formation of government departments. This process takes place in all spheres of government, including local government. The realisation of government's goals of service delivery therefore depends much on the coordination of activities of politicians and public servants. The question of whether an electoral mandate or a political party manifesto is indeed translated into government services is not addressed here. This is because, while service delivery is not an end in itself, neither is electioneering. These two variables (service delivery and electioneering) are processes of realising the improvement of the lives of the community and thereby addressing its development challenges. The role of government institutions is key to this service delivery progression (value chain) since it is at this stage that government capacity is sourced, which will determine whether services are provided or not. At this stage the question of whether delivery is done on the basis of either societal needs, electoral mandate or any other agenda is assessed. From a policy analysis perspective, this begs the question as to who sets the local government management service delivery agenda? This question is based on the presumption that the agenda should be set by the society itself, because all efforts in addressing service delivery progression (value chain) must address societal needs (Phago and Netswera 2009).

### **3.4 Service realisation**

The question in this discussion is whether election results are influenced by the service delivery promises made during elections. A logical understanding of this would argue that once government performance is poor or does not effectively address the needs of the society, a different political party should be elected into government.

This articulation that service delivery progression or the value chain (from societal needs to service realisation) involves a chain of support to address the needs of the society is relevant for both the government and opposition parties during times of elections. The demands of service delivery progression include holding political parties or independent candidates to account by developing or strengthening accountability systems. While service delivery progression assists in the tracking of stakeholders involved in the value chain of service delivery needs, its relevance for understanding the results of the 2011 elections is the next step.

## **4 MEASURING RESULTS OF THE 2011 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS**

From a constitutional point of view, the activities of political parties should be aligned to the notion of a social contract formed by the party that is supported by the majority of voters in a particular municipality. In order to understand an application of this phenomenon better, key challenges identified in the LGTAS are discussed. An analysis of the three most prominent parties' manifestos is undertaken to indicate whether these election manifestos have considered the challenges identified in the LGTAS.

### **4.1 Local Government Turnaround Strategy**

The newly established Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) replaced the Department of Provincial and Local Government in 2009 with the inauguration of Jacob Zuma's administration. In order to position its relevance, COGTA undertook a study which led to a strategy titled the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) to address major service delivery challenges. The main reasons for calling it a 'turnaround strategy' seem to have been that the existing approaches and conditions of municipalities required an overhaul to effectively address municipal service delivery challenges. This so-called turnaround strategy identified several root causes challenging the local government system that require the attention of political parties (COGTA 2009: 3):

- Systemic factors that are linked to the model of local government;
- Policy and legislative matters;
- Political factors;
- Weaknesses of the accountability system;
- Poor intergovernmental support and oversight;

- Issues associated with intergovernmental fiscal system.

In considering how the above challenges should be addressed to improve the service provision agenda of local government, political parties would be expected to align their election manifestos to these in order to test whether: (1) political parties attend to the actual challenges facing local government; or (2) the community voting patterns are influenced by the manifestos of political parties. It should be understood from the strategy that extensive consultations with local government stakeholders have been conducted to ensure that the strategy is widely accepted and therefore becomes a legitimate tool to understand the challenges facing local government, such as poor performance and dysfunctionality in municipalities. These are major challenges which require relevant extensive interventions that must be articulated during electioneering (COGTA 2009: 3).

## **4.2 Election manifestos**

Election manifestos are intended to articulate the proposed programmes of action for political parties once they are elected to power. During the 2011 elections, 121 political parties participated, with the African National Congress (ANC) taking 63.5 per cent of the overall votes, while the Democratic Alliance (DA) attracted 21.97 per cent and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) 3.94 per cent of the votes (IEC 2011, online). An analysis of these three major political parties in the South African local government space follows below. While it is impossible to analyse the political manifestos of all the political parties which participated in the 2011 elections, a focus on these three could assist in determining whether their manifestos were informed by the LGTAS and whether said manifestos persuaded the electorate.

### ***4.2.1 African National Congress***

Since the first democratic local government elections in 1995/96 for transitional councils, the ANC has been voted with overwhelming majorities into several municipal councils. There are exceptional cases where the ANC is not in power. Of the nine provinces in South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape are the main areas where competition amongst political parties is usually visible. In the other provinces there are pockets of municipalities where the ANC is not in the majority. This is evident from the results of the 2011 elections, where the ANC won 63.5 per cent of the vote nationally (IEC 2011, online).

The ANC Local Government Manifesto (ANC 2011) commenced with a defensive approach that sought to acknowledge that it had been in a position of power and



would like to continue to be. This approach recollected its achievements over the past several years and identified challenges that lay ahead. An alignment was also forged with its Manifesto for the 2009 national election (hereafter the 2009 election) by referring directly to the priority areas that need to be addressed. The Manifesto argued that since local government is the sphere of government closest to the society, the Manifesto for the 2009 national and provincial government elections could be implemented better at local level. In actual fact, this linkage with the national and provincial government elections was articulated in the following aspects:

- Facilitate local economies for decent employment creation and sustainable livelihoods. In this regard, attention should be given to the New Growth Path programme which intends to create five million jobs in the next 10 years.
- Enhance municipal services and broaden access by the society to such services. A government commitment of over R800 million for the construction of social and economic infrastructure as well as the repairing and maintenance of the ailing municipal infrastructure was made.
- Improve community participation in local government. Community participation in regard to different participation forums such as ward committees should be strengthened.
- Promote social cohesion and non-racial, integrated and safer communities. Attention is given to the notion of establishing human settlements, the upgrading of informal settlements, and crime prevention.
- Ensure accountable and integrated government in the three spheres. Reference is made to the LGTAS to consolidate and strengthen municipalities through support from national and provincial government. While corruption seems pervasive in local government, efforts such as monitoring and evaluation by the national government will be used to track and improve municipal performance. (ANC 2011: 4–14)

The above focus areas were detailed within the ANC Manifesto in an attempt to explain what the party understood to be the challenges facing local government and how those problems should be addressed. In questioning whether the ANC Manifesto addressed the main challenges, it appears that it did not feature many of the issues raised in the LGTAS, such as systemic factors linked to the model of local government, policy and legislative matters, political factors, and issues associated with intergovernmental fiscal system. Of the six aspects raised by the LGTAS, the ANC Manifesto addressed mainly two issues.



#### 4.2.2 *Democratic Alliance*

In terms of the results of the 2011 elections, the DA was the second most popular party on the South African political landscape with 21.97 per cent support across the country (IEC 2011, online). What this section seeks to understand is whether this popularity is the result of a proper understanding of and response to the local government challenges as outlined by the LGTAS. The answer to this question is contained in the following key aspects of the DA Local Government Manifesto (DA 2011):

- The reduction of poverty through economic growth and job creation. In this regard, the DA manifesto attempted to address a range of issues that were seen as relevant for growth and job creation, namely:
  - Clean and transparent government;
  - Effective and efficient government;
  - Planning and regulation of spatial and economic growth;
  - Construction and maintenance of municipal infrastructure;
  - Facilitate accessible government;
  - Private and inter-municipal partnerships;
  - Sustainability in resource usage;
  - Provision of human settlements; and
  - Crime prevention.
- The delivery of basic municipal services for all, including the following focus areas, namely:
  - Caring for the poor through relevant indigent policy interventions;
  - Clean water, electricity, sewerage, refuse removal, primary health care and social development. (DA 2011: 5–16)

The above articulation by the DA election manifesto, while considering a broad range of issues on local government, also fell short of addressing some parts of the LGTAS. The following did not receive attention in that regard: systemic factors linked to the model of local government; policy and legislative matters; political factors; weaknesses of the accountability system; poor intergovernmental support and oversight; and issues associated with the intergovernmental fiscal system. In this case, the DA Manifesto has not paid sufficient attention to the LGTAS in its election campaign. However, what is clear about the manifesto is that it considered the role of local government on the basis of section 152 of the Constitution.

### 4.2.3 *Inkatha Freedom Party*

While the IFP is the third most popular political party in South Africa's party politics, its electoral support in the 2011 elections was only 3.94% per cent of the total vote. It indicates huge margins in favour of the ANC and DA. Key issues that received attention in the IFP Local Government Manifesto (IFP 2011) included:

- More openness regarding municipal and council information enquired by members of society,
- More efficiency regarding the use of municipal resources and thereby minimising corruption,
- Working with society to create accountable government whereby municipal administration pays attention to the needs of the community.

Interpretation of the IFP's intentions as articulated in its 2011 Manifesto is very difficult, because it did not provide the same level of details as those provided by the ANC and DA. One question that arises is whether the IFP did make assessments and evaluations to determine the significance of its Manifesto for the 2011 elections.

The discussion so far has sought to compare the three political parties' manifestos with the LGTAS. This is done, because the LGTAS claims to have identified the key challenges facing municipalities in South Africa as well as the possible proposals of how these challenges can be addressed from a government perspective. For the LGTAS to be regarded as legitimate, it is assumed here that political parties' election manifestos on local government should have embraced its contents. On the balance of evidence, however, the three main political parties have largely ignored it, and therefore it is possible to conclude that the political parties did not regard the existing government diagnostic approaches very seriously. A further observation about the ANC and DA election manifestos shows that most of the issues raised by them are not necessarily a local government constitutional competency. For example, human settlement provision and crime prevention are national-provincial concurrent powers and not local powers. The ANC's challenge, in particular, was to translate its 2009 election manifesto into local government programmes, because of the different constitutional competencies of the three spheres of government. From the above observation it is clear that the manifestos of the three popular political parties did not directly relate to the LGTAS as much as was expected.

It is interesting that the manifestos of both the ANC and DA focused on similar issues, such as accountable local government, unemployment and infrastructural provision. Since the discussion above argues that the political parties did not

replicate what the government regards as the key problems in local government, the question is what then influenced or determined the election results.

## **5 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THE ELECTION RESULTS**

Twinning of election campaigns with service delivery expectations is based on a hypothesis that politicians and their political parties expect to mobilise popular electoral support by designing their election campaigns on the promise of providing better service delivery than any of the other parties. These promises are usually premised on the party's understanding of the societal needs. In this regard, political parties' campaigns are used as platforms to enter into a social contract with the voters. In the case of local government, the Constitution positions municipalities as organs of government closest to communities and mandated to deliver basic services, such as water and sanitation, municipal infrastructure and electricity, among others. Instead of confirming the above hypothesis on service delivery, research has revealed other factors that determine the results of the 2011 elections (Matebisi and Botes 2011: 5). The following key factors emerged from an analysis of the main parties' campaigns and election manifestos in the 2011 elections:

### **5.1 Service delivery track record**

Steyn-Kotze (2006: 212) believes that despite the challenges of race relations, service delivery issues were certainly contributing factors to the election results. During the 2011 elections, anecdotal cases of uncovered toilets in the Western Cape and Free State became metaphors for service delivery problems and lack of good governance. (The *Mail & Guardian* newspaper called 2011 the 'toilet election'). The elections were characterised by contestation between the ANC and DA about their track record of government performance in the municipalities where they have held power. In most instances, discrediting of the underperforming or corrupt political party was used as an election campaign strategy (ANC 2011: 4–14; DA 2011: 5–16).

### **5.2 Popularity of a candidate within the ward**

During the 2011 elections, political parties, in particular the ANC, experienced several challenges. Mantashe (2011, online) in his capacity as the Secretary General of the ANC, stated that disgruntled members had referred the matter of candidate nominations to the courts to decide on the legitimacy of the list process. In some

cases where the list processes were not resolved, members of the communities within wards forwarded their alternative candidates as independents to the IEC. The 2011 elections were characterised by the highest number of independent candidates since 1995. Many of them were disgruntled ANC members who did not accept the centralised process of candidate nomination and often disregarded local candidates. Though not many of them were elected in the end, the ANC sacrificed its popularity and sense of local authenticity because of the unpopular nomination process.

### **5.3 Voter apathy, race relations and allegiance to a political party**

The DA studied the challenges of race relations and allegiance to the liberation movements and therefore encouraged voter apathy among the blacks, who have traditionally supported movements such as the ANC (At the same time it encouraged its own supporters to vote actively and increase the DA support relative to the other parties'). This approach was used against the backdrop of the DA's understanding that in many cases voting is still about race and allegiance to a political party. These are historical legacies of the apartheid city in South Africa and it would need concerted efforts from many political parties, government and civil society to change them (Steyn-Kotze 2006: 209). Paradoxically, it is not in the ANC's interest to change them, because it can only affect its large electoral majority negatively.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

This article questioned whether the election campaigns of the main political parties during the 2011 elections considered the service delivery issues that were raised in the LGTAS. An understanding of the service delivery continuum in the form of a value chain is necessary when there is an engagement on issues of social justice. The conclusion was reached that the political parties did not always agree with the government's diagnostic conclusions about the actual service delivery needs of the society. It was supported by a discussion on a lack of coherence in the three most popular political parties' 2011 election manifestos. Perhaps it is a manifestation of a diverse society with competing or different needs and that the government should be more responsive to the different needs. However, the 2011 elections demonstrated that voter behaviour is still influenced more by matters of race or historical allegiance to a party than by a rational assessment of a party's proposals on better service delivery.

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